# What took you so long?

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# What took you so long?

by Valinde (Valyria)

Summary

Nothing is more important than the hunt, than the kill.

That's what John tells himself anyway.

Notes

Prompt fill: John uses Dean as bait during a hunt and things go wrong. Dean is injured (raped?) when the plan goes bad, but insult is added to injury when he discovers his dad used him.

John never considered failure a possibility; he never considered how badly Dean could be hurt if the plan failed.
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AN: A 'Hagondes' is a Native American monster that abducts and eats the young.

John tracks the monster easily enough. Dean keeps a level head and he makes sure there's a trail of for John to follow – broken leaves and bent branches. With his prey distracting him, the Hagondes doesn't seem to notice or care.

Two hours later he's followed them deep into the forest and there are smears of blood to follow as well. It's red and human and clearly Dean's not the Hagondes. The ever increasing amount of it worries John, but Dean's tough and the monster won't hurt him too badly until he has him back in his lair. Hagondes feed off their young victims slowly. Dean will be roughed up by the time John catches up, but not badly injured. He's a hell of a lot tougher than the other high school kids the thing's been picking off one by one.

John keeps telling himself that even as the trail becomes harder to follow, just splatters and smears of blood, no longer branches and leaves marked intentionally.

He loses the trail sometime after midnight and has to double back, wasting half an hour. For the first time he thinks perhaps using Dean as bait wasn't a good idea. But no. That's just nerves. Dean's *fine.* He's a tough kid, hardened by years on the road. Even if the Hagondes has him back at its lair, it'll be playing with him, not really hurting him yet. They like to drag it out, feed off their energy before their flesh.

Still, when he hears Dean scream he's actually relieved.

The cave stinks, the remains of god knows how many teenagers and kids mouldering in the corners, and John gags a little as he enters even though he's gotten used to the stench of death over the years. It's dark, just the silver of moonlight lighting his way, so he makes himself stand still while his eyes adjust. He presses his back to cold stone and waits with ears pricked.

He can hear the monster panting and Dean crying.

*crying.*

Real fear twists in his guts for the first time as he listens to his son sob and gasp. It's a sound he hasn't heard in years. Dean will sometimes shed a silent tear or two in shame when he gets a tongue lashing for a fuck up, or in pain at a nasty injury, but he never makes any noise,

hasn't since he was a boy. Since Mary died. This is different, this is not the stoic boy he's used to, the seventeen year old who's stronger than most men twice his age. This is the sniffling, gasping, shameless crying of a child in pain and John clenches his teeth and readies his shotgun in one hand and the knife in his other.

As his eyes adjust he can make out the shape of the monster and his son. It's hunched over Dean, and for an awful moment John thinks he's wrong – thinks he's listening to his son getting *eaten*, but then he recognizes the violent rocking movement of the Hagondes. Suddenly the pained little huffing noises and broken sobs coming out of Dean seem a thousand times louder and John thinks he might be sick.

On automatic he lifts the shotgun, his aim steady, and blasts the thing in the head. It snarls and Dean screams.

The next few moments pass in a blur of adrenaline. John doesn't spare a thought for his son, just falls into the fight. The Hagondes is *strong,* but John is prepared and with it weakened by the shotgun blast, he's able to bury his blade in its shrunken heart without too much effort. It's still twitching so he hacks off its head for good measure.

When it finally stills, he sits back and pants to get his breath back. Only then does he note the sobbing coming from a few feet to his left. Dean's clothes are torn and he's a mess of blood and muck from the filthy cave floor. John kneels beside him and places a gentle hand onto his shoulder.

"Dean?"

His son flinches and curls up tighter on his side, not looking at John or responding, but his chest shakes with renewed sobs as his crying intensifies and he tries to keep it in. "Shh," John says. "It's dead now Dean. You're safe."

Dean still doesn't reply.

John has to help him walk back. He takes small painful steps and John tells himself it's because he's turned his ankle, ignores the ripped jeans hanging from bruised and bloody hips. It takes hours and Dean remains mute, silent save the occasion stifled hiss of pain and the chattering of his teeth. John feels him shivering in shock the entire way. He's no good at the soft touch but he tries to comfort him, talks

quietly, tells him that he did good to leave such a clear trail for him to track and that he's earned a few days off once they get back to the hotel, that he doesn't have to go to back to the school he and Sam have been at for the last few weeks. Dean doesn't respond, doesn't look at him.

Mercifully Sammy is asleep when they get back to the motel, and John half-carries his eldest to the bathroom, quietly so as not to wake his youngest. Dean lets his father unlace his filthy boots and pull off his ruined jeans and torn shirt, but his shivering turns into outright shaking and his teeth rattle. He stinks and a shower would be best, but John doesn't think he could wash himself in his current state, so he runs a bath.

Dean climbs in gingerly, like an old man, and when he sits down he flinches and lets out a pained whine. John stares at the blooming bruises on his son's skinny hips and thighs, the scratches on the knobs of his spine, the ugly red marks around his neck. Dean starts sobbing again, curling forward to press his face against his knees. John knows how embarrassed Dean must be to be crying in front of him, so he doesn't comment, just starts methodically washing off Dean's back, shoulders and arms. There are bite marks and finger bruises all over him, but his arms are especially bad. Rings of red and purple around his wrists and forearms where the monster had held him down and --

John swallows past a lump in his throat as he uses a wash cloth to clean Dean's bruised and skinned knuckles. It looks like he spent the evening punching a brick wall or something and his fingernails are just as bad, torn and bloody from where he'd scratched out at the Hagondes, bits of the monster's scaly black skin caught there underneath them.

Dean has gone quiet, tears dried up.

"You did good son," John says. "That thing isn't gonna hurt anyone else."

John tries to remain clinical as he cleans Dean's back – there are a few nasty bruises and a cut lower down that will need a few stitches – but as he's cleaning the sore looking, puffy bites to the back of his son's neck, his hands start shaking. He sees it in his mind's eye, the stinking Hagondes pining Dean to the ground, teeth buried in his boy's neck as its hips jerked back and forth--

He lifts his shaking hands and stares at them for a moment. When he looks up again Dean has his head resting against his knees and is staring at him, meeting his eyes for the first time since John found him.

They're red from crying and there are unshed tears clinging to his eyelashes, but his face is blank and devoid of all emotion. When his face is relaxed, when he's not smirking or grinning that big stupid teenage smile of his, Dean looks so much like his mother that it *hurts.* John finds himself looking away, over Dean's shoulder and at the dirty tiles of the motel bathroom.

"You told me to wait for you dad," Dean says and his voice is quiet and hoarse from all the screaming he's done over the last few hours.

John makes a grunting noise of vague agreement. He darts a quick look down at Dean's face. He's still staring at John, face pale and still. Just to give himself something to do John picks up the cloth again and starts rubbing at the mess of blood and mud in Dean's short hair. It's darker than Mary's was. There's a bump to the back of his skull and John carefully probes at it with callused fingertips, but there's no fracture.

"What took you so long?" Dean asks, voice cold and flat.

"I came as fast as I could Dean," John tells him.

"I heard you," Dean whispers. "Saw you."

John freezes.

"You were there when it jumped me."

John opens his mouth to explain, defend his actions. Dean was bait, sure, but it was hardly the first time and he hadn't thought the thing would do more than rough him up,  hadn't known *how* it played with its food, but he can't form the sentences.

"I kept waiting for you to jump out and stop it," Dean says. "But you didn't."

"Dean-" John starts but is silenced as Dean erupts into violence. He lashes out, clawing at John and throwing a wild punch towards his face. His face is twisted in anger, mouth pulled back into a snarl and

he *still* looks like Mary. His voice isn't cold anymore, it's a low hiss. "You *let him,"* he spits. "You fucking *let him--!"* but it seems Dean can't form the words either because the accusation dissolves into a meaningless howl of betrayal.

John lets him land a punch, but it's weak and off target and the ache in his jaw is unsatisfying. He catches at Dean's fists, pulling him close and trying to calm him. Dirty water sloshes over the tub, soaking his shirt and jeans as Dean fights him, thrashing and swearing. Then like a switch has been thrown, he goes limp and huddles closer, pulling at John instead of shoving. He's crying again, awful racking sobs that sound painful and make his entire body shake. *"Why'd you..."* Dean sniffs into the cotton of John's shirt. "Dad, why'd you *leave me...*" Hiccups- *"with it?"*

John pats his hair like he used to when he was much younger. He opens his mouth to say *I'm sorry.* Or *I didn't think it hurt you like that.* But instead what comes out is: "It's dead now. Job's done Dean." He grits his teeth. "Forget it."

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